

Holocaust Remembrance Day: In Context
(Based on an essay by Erica Brown, Torah U-Madda, Vol 9)
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~~ National Symbols, Collective Memory, Imagined Communities ~~

Benedict Anderson

The deliberate attempt to create collective memory termed “the formation of ‘imagined communities.’” “It is imagined because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow members, meet them or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion.”

Erica Brown

Not only has the Holocaust become the object of this century’s collective memory, but it has become, in large part, the very cement of the Jewish community. Commemorating it has created national connections and secular traditions.

E. Hobson & T. Ranger, The Invention of Tradition, p.12

“... all invented traditions, so far as possible, use history as a legitimator of action and cement group cohesion.”

Erica Brown

the Holocaust has been used to create a secular version of Jewish identity, with the necessary accompanying ritual. It is often invoked to forge a sense of uniqueness and victimization to define contemporary Jewish identity.

Emil Fackenheim, God’s Presence in History

An evil that has no explanation exists in the world, and the role of Judaism is to survive despite this evil.

Michael Wyschogrod, Faith After the Holocaust: A Review Essay...

If there is hope after the Holocaust, it is because to those who believe, the voices of the Prophets speak more loudly than did Hitler, and because the divine promise weeps over the crematoria and silences the voice of Auschwitz.

~~ Context ~~

Erica Brown

The ancient and recent past resonate with each other when their respective lessons are taught together. Perhaps it is this confluence that undergirds the rabbinic notion that the ninth of Av is a day upon which all Jewish tragedies are marked, with no single calamity the object of exclusive attention.

...

In religious readings of history, placing an event on a historical continuum gives it both significance and a vocabulary drawn from within tradition by which to understand it. If we take the Holocaust out of this continuum, we risk, among other dangers, losing the paradigms of tragedy within our ancient history to understand our recent past. We lose as well the vocabulary of tradition that has helped us confront other catastrophes.

J.T.Baumel & J.J.Schacter, “The 93 Bais Yaakov Girls of Cracow: History or Typology”

In their effort to maintain faith in God in the face of often incredible suffering, Jewish victims of tragedy in all centuries felt constrained to view their experiences as part of a continuum and not as something radically new and different. Although they may have objectively believed that the magnitude of their suffering was unprecedented, they never presented it as such, for fear that this

might indicate that God was finally breaking His covenantal bond and severing His close relationship with His people, a thought they simply could not abide and one that their faith would not allow them to accept. Whatever cataclysmic event they experienced was never seen in isolation, as *sui generis*, but, on the contrary, was portrayed as just the latest example of the age-old, consistently recurring phenomenon of God's punishment for Jewish sin. Indeed, the Jewish collective memory was so long and sharp that at any time it confronted even a tragedy of major proportions, it was able to place it into paradigms of previously experienced tragedies and destructions.

The Pledge of the March of the Living

We pledge to keep alive and honor the legacy
of the multitudes of our people who perished in the Holocaust.
We pledge to fight anti-Semitism, anti-Zionism, Holocaust denial
and all other forms of hatred directed towards the Jewish people and Israel.
We pledge to fight every form of discrimination manifested
against any religion, nationality or ethnic group.
We pledge to actively participate in the strengthening
of Jewish life in the Diaspora and Israel.
We pledge to increase our knowledge of our Jewish heritage
and to pass on a love of Jewish life and learning to the next generation.
We pledge to give tzedaka, to assist in helping the Jewish needy,
wherever they may live in the world.
We pledge to involve ourselves in tikkun olam,
to build a better world for all member of the human family.
After the Shoah the promise of 'Never Again' was proclaimed.
We pledge to create a world where 'Never Again' will become a reality
for the Jewish people and, indeed, for all people.
This is our solemn pledge to the Jewish people, to those who came before us, to those of our
generation, and to those who will follow in future generations.

~~ Fate v Destiny ~~

R. Soloveichik, Kol Dodi Dofek

The covenant in Egypt = survival against "*goral*"- random, meaningless, reduces man to a passive state of response to suffering.

The covenant of Sinai = "*yi'ud*":

an active mode of existence, one wherein man confronts the environment into which he was thrown, possessed of an understanding of his uniqueness, of his special worth, of his freedom, and of his ability to struggle with his external circumstances without forfeiting his independence or his selfhood. . . . Man is born like an object, dies like an object but possesses the ability to live like a subject, like a creator, an innovator, who can impress his own individual seal upon his life and can extricate himself from a mechanical type of existence and enter into a creative, active mode of being. Man's task in the world, according to Judaism, is to transform fate into destiny; a passive existence into an active existence; an existence of compulsion, perplexity, and muteness into an existence replete with a powerful will, with resourcefulness, daring, and imagination.

...

"[o]ur historic obligation, today, is to raise ourselves from people to a holy nation, from the covenant in Egypt to the covenant at Sinai, from an existence of necessity to an authentic way of life suffused with ethical and religious values. . . ."